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THE CATHOLIC LAYMAN

Glór do Dé a n-áin Dé, agus Dé a n-áin Dé.

Luke ii. 14.

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SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF ST. PATRICK.

THERE are few right-minded persons who do not feel pleasure in contemplating the history of the great and good men who, in times long past, have exercised important influences upon the state and spirit of their age; and we would fain hope there are fewer still who, in looking back upon the illustrious names that adorn the annals of their native land, do not feel a throb of national pride, or, at least, some impulse of a generous enthusiasm stirring within their hearts. We do not envy the man for whom the records of departed greatness have no attractions; still less do we envy him whose sympathies cannot be touched, even by the memories of the wise and the good who have shed a lustre upon the country of his birth. Insensibility to the claims which the illustrious dead have upon the reverence of the living, is not, however, one of the faults of Irishmen; on the contrary, our national character is honourably distinguished for a high appreciation of by-gone worth, and for an affectionate clinging to the traditions in which the history of our earlier saints and heroes has been enshrined and transmitted from age to age.

These reflections have been suggested by the approach of the day which, in our national annals, has been consecrated to the memory of the apostle and chief patron saint of Ireland.* During a period of more than fourteen centuries the name of St. Patrick has been honoured and cherished by every genuine Irishman. But in this, as in similar cases, the lapse of so many ages has produced the effect that, of the multitudes who regard him as identified with their nationality and religion, there are comparatively few who possess anything like an accurate acquaintance with his history, and the part which he sustained in the evangelizing of the country. Nay, more, we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that, besides the want of information which generally prevails upon the subject of the life and times of this eminent servant of God, there are also many erroneous opinions popularly entertained, whether arising from vulgar prejudices, or—as it is to be feared they have done in too many instances—from intentional misrepresentation. We have, accordingly, thought that it might be neither uninteresting nor unprofitable, upon the present occasion, to give a brief summary of those incidents in St. Patrick's life which are most important for us to know, and which, in the opinion of the learned men who have most carefully investigated the subject, are best entitled to our belief.

SEC. 1. CHRISTIANITY IN IRELAND BEFORE SAINT PATRICK.

Before entering on the personal history of Saint Patrick, it may be well to say a word relative to the reli-

gious state of Ireland prior to his mission, especially as many persons appear to think, that he was in such a sense the Apostle of Ireland, that the sound of the Gospel had never reached our shores before his arrival. Now, this is a great mistake. The express testimonies of ancient writers,* together with other arguments which we cannot now stop to consider, have led Roman Catholic as well as Protestant ecclesiastical historians to the conclusion, that Christianity was planted in this country very many years before St. Patrick's age, though how, or by whom, it is now impossible to determine. At all events, it is certain, from Prosper's words, which we shall quote in the next section, that Christian believers existed in Ireland before the mission of Palladius, the immediate predecessor of St. Patrick.

SEC. 2. MISSION OF PALLADIUS.

However, though Christianity had been, as we have just said, very early introduced into Ireland, it does not appear to have flourished much down to the beginning of the fifth century. Its professors seem to have been few in number, and confined, chiefly or exclusively, to the southern portions of the island. Accordingly, our native annalists usually begin their ecclesiastical records with the mission of Palladius, who, as we learn from the chronicle of Prosper (a contemporary writer), "was ordained by Pope Celestine, and sent as first bishop to the Scots [*i. e.*, the Irish] believing in Christ." This famous mission of Palladius took place A.D. 431, the same year in which the ecumenical council—that of Ephesus—was held. It is plain, from the words of Prosper just quoted, that a church already existed in Ireland when Palladius arrived there, over which he was appointed the first, or, as some understand the Latin word *primus*, the chief bishop.† However, the mission of Palladius proved a complete failure. After remaining for a short time—at the most a year—in Ireland, he was obliged to retire into Scotland, where he died not long after.

SEC. 3. ARRIVAL OF ST. PATRICK IN IRELAND.

It is generally agreed on, that the year after the arrival of Palladius—namely, A.D. 432—is that in which St. Patrick first visited these shores as a missionary. It is a much disputed point whether, like Palladius, he was sent upon this mission by the Bishop of Rome, or whether he was urged solely by the impulse of his own mind to undertake it. Viewing the matter, we trust, impartially, we must confess that the weight of evidence seems to be against the former of these opinions. If St. Patrick derived his commission from the Bishop of Rome, it must have been from Celestine. But Prosper does not say a single word about such a commission; and it is highly improbable that he—the friend, the counsellor, and the panegyrist of Celestine—would mention the abortive attempt of Palladius, and wholly pass over the successful one of St. Patrick. Nor, again, is there any intimation given, in St. Patrick's own writings,‡ that he received his commission from the Pope. And, indeed, two of the most learned Roman Catholic writers, Colgan and Dr. Lanigan, candidly admit|| that the *consecration* of St. Patrick by Pope Celestine cannot be maintained, though they are, of course, unwilling to concede that his commission was not, in some way or other, derived from Rome.

SEC. 4. HISTORY OF ST. PATRICK DOWN TO THE TIME OF HIS MISSION TO IRELAND.

We may now, before proceeding to give a sketch of the missionary labours of St. Patrick, review briefly the earlier history of his life. Upon the whole of this period much obscurity hangs; and in some particulars we have little else than conjectures, more or less probable, to guide us. This is the case, first of all, with respect to the *place of his birth*. Primate Ussher, who

* Tertullian, *adv. jud.* c. 7. Eusebius, *Dem. Evang. Lib. iii. c. 7.* Chrysost. *oper. iii.*, 71 (edit. Bened.); vid. Lanigan's *Eccles. Hist. I.*, pp. 1—9.

† The Irish were generally called by the name of Scots in early times, especially from the fourth to the eleventh century, at the latter of which epochs there is reason to think that the country now called Scotland first received that appellation.

‡ There are other indications which seem to show that an episcopacy existed in Ireland before the arrival of Palladius.

|| On the contrary, in his celebrated "Confession," and in his epistle to Coroticus, he ascribes his mission exclusively to a heavenly call.

|| Lanigan, *Eccles. Hist. I.* 191. Colgan, *Tr. Thaum.*, p. 253.

has been followed by Colgan and most subsequent writers, was of opinion that he was born in Scotland, near the present Dunbarton; whilst Dr. Lanigan has endeavoured to prove, that his birth-place was the town on the north coast of France, now called Boulogne.* Other writers have suggested different places. Amongst the rest, the claims of Wales have been lately put forward, but on the authority of comparatively recent writings. The cause of this diversity of opinion is the difficulty of now identifying the ancient names of the places that are mentioned in connection with his birth.†

As to the *date* of his birth, the year A.D. 372 is usually assigned, though in this particular, also, considerable diversity of opinion prevails.‡ His name, we are told,§ was originally *Succat*; but he is generally known by the Latin name of *Patricius*, or *Patrick*. The statement in one of the ancient lives of him,|| to the effect that he was of Jewish origin, his ancestors having come into Britain after the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, seems to have originated in a false reading of a passage in the "Confession."

From the "Confession" we learn the remarkable fact, that *his father was a deacon and his grandfather a priest*—the former being named *Calphurnius*, the latter *Potitus*. When about sixteen years of age (*i. e.*, A.D. 388) he was taken captive, with many others, by some Irish pirates, carried into the north of Ireland, and there sold to a Pagan prince, named *Milcho*, who employed him in taking care of his cattle. The scene of his slavery seems to have been somewhere near Ballymena, in the county of Antrim. His affliction produced a happy effect on his mind. He tells us himself, in his "Confession," "that, up to the period of his captivity, he knew not the true God; but that, in the strange land, the Lord brought him to a sense of his unbelief; so that, although late, he called his sins to remembrance, and turned with his whole heart to the Lord his God, who regarded his low estate, took pity on his youth and ignorance, watched over him before he knew him, and before he could discern between good and evil: protected him and comforted him, as a father his own son."

SEC. 5. HISTORY OF ST. PATRICK'S MISSIONARY LABOURS.

Having spent probably about six years in captivity, he contrived to make his escape and regain his native land. He tells us himself, in his "Confession," "that he heard a voice in a dream, which directed him to flee to a certain part of the coast, where he should find a vessel that would convey him to his home. Some time after this, he was again taken captive, but this second captivity lasted only for a short time, as he was restored to his friends within sixty days. It was a few years after this that he felt himself impelled by an irresistible desire to revisit the land of his first long exile, and communicate to the benighted inhabitants the knowledge of the blessed Gospel. He thought he beheld in a vision of the night a person, named *Victoricus*, who brought him innumerable letters from Ireland, inviting him, in the name of the people of Ireland, to come amongst them. This took place about the year 397. Having made up his mind to devote his future life to this mission, he immediately set about qualifying himself for it; and with this view he placed himself under the care and instruction of the celebrated *Germanus*, Bishop of *Auxerre*, in France, with whom he remained a considerable time, "eagerly applying his mind to the attainment of wisdom, and the learning of the Holy Scriptures." He is also said, though on more doubtful authority, to have spent some time with the

* That Lanigan is wrong is decisively proved by the following passage of the "Confession" (cap. 19), in which Britain and Gaul are expressly distinguished. "Unde autem possent etsi voluerent dimittere illas, et peregre in *Britannias*, etiam libertassime paratus irem, quasi ad patriam et parentes; et non id solum, sed etiam usque ad *Galias* visitare fratres meos, ut viderem faciem sanctorum Domini mel."

† In the "Confession" we are informed that his birth-place was called *Bonavena*. The Hymn of Flech says he was born at a place called *Nenthur*, or (as an eminent Irish scholar thinks it should be written, *Emtor*). The author of his life, in the *Leabhar Breac*, states he was born at *Ailchluaid*.

‡ Usher gives the above date. Colgan prefers 373. Lanigan reduces it as low as 287.

§ Euseb. "Genealogies of the Saints in the Leabhar Breac."

|| Ibid.

¶ How long is uncertain. See Lanigan I. 155-7.

* It may, perhaps, be unnecessary to state, that Ireland has three patron saints—St. Patrick, St. Columbkille, and St. Brigid.

still more famous St. Martin, of Tours, and in the renowned monastery of Lerins, acquiring stores of knowledge and experience for the great work which lay before him.

This brings us to the year 432, in which, as above said (sec. 3), he carried into execution his long-projected missionary visit to our shores. If we are right in assigning the year 372 as that of his birth, it follows that he was sixty years old at the commencement of his mission. He first landed on the coast of Leinster, probably at the place now called Wicklow. But having met with violent opposition from the Pagans and their idolatrous priests—the Druids or Magi—he took ship again, and directed his course to the northern parts of Ireland—the scene of his early captivity—and landed on the coast of Down; perhaps in the Bay of Dumbard, or, as Dr. Lanigan thinks, at or near Strangford. Here his preaching met with better success. His first convert was Diclu, the chieftain of that district, whose example was followed by a great many of his subjects. It was on this occasion that the celebrated chapel, called *Sabball Phadraig*, or Patrick's Barn, was erected: being the first church founded by St. Patrick, and the spot where his mortal remains probably repose. The modern name of this interesting place is Saul.

The following year, A.D. 433, one of the most remarkable occurrences in St. Patrick's life took place—namely, his preaching on Easter-day before Leogaire, the supreme monarch of Ireland, at Tara, in the County Meath, where the national parliament was then assembled for the celebration of the chief Pagan festival. An account of St. Patrick's visit to Tara, with the hymn which he composed on that occasion, and which is known as the *Luireach Phadraig*, or Patrick's Armour, is given in our last number, to which we, therefore, refer our readers. The subsequent events of his missionary career it is, according to Dr. Lanigan, next to impossible to arrange with a sufficient degree of chronological accuracy.* After preaching throughout Meath, he seems next to have visited Connaught, about A.D. 435. Having spent, it is thought, about seven years in his Connaught mission, he then visited Leinster, the province in which he had been at first so unsuccessful. Now, however, it pleased God that his labours should be crowned with success: the princes of the country embraced the Gospel with alacrity, and encouraged their subjects to do the same. Munster was now the only remaining province of Ireland where he had not made known the message of peace. It has been thought that the reason why he left Munster for the last was, that as Christianity had been already planted there, his presence was less necessary than in other parts of the island. One of the first places in Munster which he visited was Cashel, which was then the seat of the royal residence. The date of this was about A.D. 445. The king, (Engus, became a convert, and assisted St. Patrick in setting to rights the ecclesiastical affairs in his kingdom. In Munster he is supposed to have spent about seven years. Having concluded his labours there, he returned to Down, somewhere about the year A.D. 452; and took up thenceforth his abode at Saul, the place where, as we have seen, he first succeeded in planting the religion of Christ. About three years after his return to the north—that is to say, about the year A.D. 455—he is supposed by many learned men to have founded the metropolitan See of Armagh.† The date, however, of this event is much disputed. Archbishop Ussher fixes it ten years earlier—i.e., A.D. 445.

Between the metropolitan church of Armagh, and the Abbey of Saul, St. Patrick spent the remainder of his days, in retirement and peace. Near the close of his life he seems to have written his famous "Confession," addressed to the people of Ireland, with a view to give them an account of the motives which influenced him to undertake his mission, and the hopes which sustained him in his various trials and dangers: as also to record the goodness of God towards himself and those among whom he had so long laboured. We may observe, in passing, that this work, which there is every reason to regard as the genuine production of St. Patrick, and the most valuable extant document relating to his life, is characterized throughout by an exalted tone of piety, and exhibits an unmistakeable evidence of a mind deeply imbued with a knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, and a profound sense of their supreme authority. The year of his death is uncertain. The most generally received opinion assigns for it A.D. 492 or 493. This would make his age 120 years, which accordingly forms one of the four points of resemblance, remarked by certain ancient writers, between him and Moses.‡ The day of his decease is undisputed—namely, the 17th of March: which day has, accordingly, from time immemorial, been observed for his commemoration. It may seem strange that the burial-place of so great a saint should not be certainly known; yet so it is. Some claim that honour for Armagh; whilst others, with more probability, maintain that he was buried in Down. The memory of the exact place of his interment must have been lost

very early: for we find one of the ancient writers above alluded to,* and who wrote, probably, about the close of the seventh century, stating the fourth point of resemblance between St. Patrick and Moses to consist in this, that "no one knew where were his bones."

SEC. 7. TWO OPPOSITE ERRORS RESPECTING ST. PATRICK TO BE AVOIDED.

We have all along taken for granted that the various accounts which remain to us of the life of St. Patrick, though differing from each other in many points, are all correct in affirming, as they do, his actual existence and his mission to Ireland; yet a few learned men have been found who have not hesitated to assert that the whole history of his life is a fable.† Some of their reasons are plausible; but they are not strong enough to shake the historical evidence on the other side. This scepticism seems to have been nothing else than a reaction against the boundless credulity with which dark and superstitious ages received and exaggerated the marvellous stories handed down respecting the miraculous powers of the saint. Whilst, therefore, we, on the one hand, feel ourselves compelled to reject such stories as idle tales, we feel no hesitation, upon the other, in protesting against a reckless criticism, which, if pursued to its legitimate consequences, would leave the history of the past an utter blank. To such sceptics, if any such now exist, we recommend the following judicious observations of Dr. O'Connor:—"Even if all the authorities and manuscripts in which St. Patrick is expressly mentioned were destroyed, the laws of just criticism forbid that, after the lapse of so many ages, and the destruction of so many monasteries and libraries as formerly existed in Ireland before the Danish invasions, the silence alone of such authors as remain (supposing such silence) should be admitted in evidence to overthrow a national tradition, so universal in every part of Ireland, Scotland, and Mann, so immemorial and so incorporated as that of St. Patrick is with the traditional usages, names, anniversaries, monastic ruins, and popular manners of the millions of Irishmen who have existed since his time."‡

PURGATORY.

WE avail ourselves of this opportunity, according to the pledge given in our last number, to give our readers some extracts from a valuable work, attributed to St. Patrick, and which has been included in nearly all the collections of his works down to that of the learned Villanueva, published by Grasberry, Dublin, 1835; and treated as genuine not only by the learned Protestant writers, Archbishop Ussher and Sir Henry Spelman, but also by Father Colgan and other eminent Roman Catholic writers, and which is, at any rate, admitted by all scholars to be a treatise of great value and antiquity. The tract we allude to is entitled "The Three Habitations," or abodes of spirits; the subject of which is so directly connected with the matter in question, that it would be somewhat strange if it did not afford a strong testimony, one way or other, upon it. We think it does afford a striking negative testimony in favour of the assertion of Protestants, that the doctrine of a belief in purgatory is not based upon a tradition as old as the times of the apostles, but is an invention of a more modern date, which men have been led into believing, partly by fear and partly by credulity, without (as we hope hereafter to prove) any adequate proof, either from the Holy Scriptures, reason, or the writings of the early Fathers, when rightly understood. At present, however, we must confine ourselves to the treatise of St. Patrick, to which we have referred: "De tribus habitaculis regno Dei, mundo, inferno."§ The first chapter (we give the translation only, as there can be no dispute about its correctness) commences as follows:—

"There are three habitations under the government of the Almighty God—the upper, the lowermost, and the middle: of these the *uppermost* is called the kingdom of God, or heaven; the *lowermost* is termed hell; the *middle* is named *this present world*, or *this earth*. The two extremes are altogether contrary the one to the other, and have nothing whatever in common with each other; for what fellowship can there be between light and darkness—between Christ and Belial? but the middle hath some similitude with the extremes: whence it is that it hath light and darkness, cold and heat, pain and no pain, joy and sorrow, hatred and love, the good and the bad, the just and the unjust, masters and servants, death and life, and innumerable other such like things; of which the one part bears an image of the kingdom of God, and the other of hell. For, in this world, there is a mixture of good men and bad men together; whereas in the kingdom of God there are none bad—all are good; but in hell all are bad—none are good. And both of these places are being filled up out of the middle;

* Tirechan, whose notes on the life of St. Patrick are preserved in the Book of Armagh.

† Dr. Ledwich is the most remarkable of those who have maintained this paradox. See Lanigan i. 48.

‡ Columbanus ad Hib., No. 3, p. 59.

§ Sancti Patricii Iberorum Apostoli Synodi Canones, Opuscula Scholii Illustrata, a J. L. Villanueva. Dublini, 1835. P. 280.

for of the men of this world some are lifted up to heaven, others are dragged down to hell—namely, like are joined to like: that is to say, good to good, and bad to bad; just men to just angels, and wicked men to wicked angels; the servants of God to God, the servants of the devil to the devil; the blessed are called to the kingdom prepared for them from the beginning of the world, the cursed are driven away into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

He then proceeds to describe, in scriptural language, the happiness of the blessed in heaven and the torments of the damned in hell, where there shall be "weeping and gnashing of teeth," and innumerable kinds of tortures. In chapter 3 he eloquently descants on the insanity of those whom *eternal punishment* does not deter from the pleasures of the world; and whom (in the 4th chapter) he urges to resist the suggestions of Satan, and leave the "broad way" which leads to death for the "narrow path" which Christ trod before us, and which leads to life eternal. In chapter 5 he defends the prescience of God as compatible with the free agency of man: and ends this earnest and beautiful treatise by a chapter on the knowledge or the triple vision of body, spirit, and understanding, of the blessed in heaven. From beginning to end there is not contained in it the slightest allusion to any such place or state as purgatory, or to masses for the dead, or any such topic. This is admitted by Dr. Lanigan and Mr. Brenan, both Roman Catholic historians; though they try to account for it in different ways, both equally unsatisfactory to any unbiased mind. Dr. Lanigan attempts to explain it, by saying that St. Patrick had no occasion to mention purgatory in this tract, as it is only on *permanent habitations*; in which case, however, it is obvious that the *present world*, as well as *purgatory*, would have been omitted, as no one can conceive this world to be a *permanent habitation*. Mr. Brenan suggests that, as hope is not excluded from purgatory, *purgatory* may, perhaps, be included, by the author of this treatise, under the state of happiness, or *heaven*. To this we shall venture to reply, in the words of Mr. King, in his Church History of Ireland, vol. i., p. 49:—"This is, to say the least of it, an unusually pleasant notion of purgatory; and one that, if generally received, might save some money to many of our poor countrymen, and dissipate, too, some of their puratorial societies; it will hardly, however, strike our Roman Catholic friends as a very satisfactory way of meeting the troublesome silence of the treatise in question."*

We have thus redeemed our pledge, so far as the opinions of St. Patrick are concerned. We shall take occasion hereafter to call the attention of our readers to other testimonies equally important, including that of St. Leo the Great, himself one of the popes, who was contemporary with St. Patrick, and died in 461, and who appears to have been as little acquainted with the idea of penitents paying or performing in purgatory what they had failed to pay here, as St. Patrick himself: and we shall also discuss, *seriatim*, the several passages of Scripture and the Fathers relied on by Roman Catholic writers in favour of their opinions; remembering that the burden of proving their opinions to be true fairly lies on them, and not on those who rest on the distinct revelation of heaven and hell, as to which there is no dispute. In the meantime we would crave the attention of our serious readers to the consideration of the following words of our Blessed Lord, and his holy and beloved apostle, St. John, taken from the Douay Testament—"Amen, Amen, I say unto you, that he who heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, *hath life everlasting, and cometh not into judgment*, but is passed from death into life."—5th ch. Saint John's Gospel, 24th verse. If the servant of God passeth—nay, is passed from death to *life*, and cometh not into judgment, how can he pass from death to the excruciating, though terminable, pains of purgatory? Those who *have* eternal life can suffer no intermediate punishment, judgment, or condemnation, according to the doctrine of Christ; and if any are apprehensive lest *even the blessed* should not be pure enough without purgatorial cleansing, let him read what the blessed apostle St. John says, in his first Epistle, ch. i., v. 7:—"The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from *all sin*." If that be true, what further cleansing is left for purgatory to do? and on that view and on no other we can easily understand the glorious and comforting words of the same St. John, in the Apocalyptic vision, where he writes—"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. From *henceforth now*, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, for their works follow them."—Apoc. ch. xiv., 13th ver.

CREDULITY AND SCEPTICISM.—Credulity has been well defined to be "belief without reason;" and scepticism its opposite, as—"Reason without belief." It is difficult to determine which is the more incompatible with practical common sense.

* As to the place called St. Patrick's Purgatory, in Lough Derg, County Donegal, which may occur to the minds of some of our readers, it never was believed by any one to have relation to the future state; and Dr. Lanigan (vol. i., p. 368) states that it never was heard of till the eleventh century, 500 years after St. Patrick's time; and that it was demolished in 1497, by order of the Pope, though in some manner restored since.

* Lanigan i., 257.

† See Lanigan i., 313.

‡ See Lanigan i., 133.